

We Nebraskans take great pride in being the Cornhusker State, but a national survey recently showed we could rightfully share the title, "Volunteer State," with Tennessee, which holds the title as its official state motto.

In terms of time spent volunteering to strengthen their communities, Cornhuskers lead the nation. The Corporation for National and Community Service, in a national survey of volunteerism among the fifty states, ranked Nebraska second in its residents' rates of volunteer service. It found that 528,100 Nebraskans contribute more than 67 million hours of service to their communities in a year. This estimated value of Nebraskans' volunteer service is \$1.4 billion.

This is not a new trend. Nebraska has ranked second now for the fourth consecutive year. Outranking other Midwestern states, our volunteer efforts are extraordinarily high across age groups. This modern day reality, I believe, is steeped in our rich cultural traditions, flowing from our agricultural heritage, of neighbor helping neighbor, hard work, community, and stewardship.

Last year, we averaged nearly 50 hours of community service per Nebraskan—an outstanding model for the nation. A new initiative, called United We Serve, calls on every American to reach out and strengthen his or her community through volunteerism this summer. It will run through the National Day of Service, on September 11, 2009, and promote a renewed spirit of civic commitment to working together to solve some of the many challenges facing our local communities.

I have always believed that the strength of the nation depends on the strength of America's families and communities. As you well know, we face tremendous challenges as a nation, but despite this—or perhaps because of it—Nebraskans continue to band together to serve the most vulnerable in our midst. I congratulate everyone who generously sacrifices time and assistance to improve the quality of life for persons who need help.

Whether it is mentoring a struggling child, cleaning up and beautifying a neighborhood park, preparing a hot meal, building a home to give shelter to someone in need, or setting aside some time to read to children at your local library, every effort, no matter how large or small, gives strength to our neighborhoods, state, and country. We as Nebraskans understand this and have provided great leadership for the rest of the country.

For more information on how you can help strengthen your community through service, please visit www.serve.gov.